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SUBJECT: ATTENTION TO HIV/AIDS INCREASES AMONG LAGOS
BUSINESSES, BUT EFFECTS OF AIDS GO UNMEASURED

1. Summary: Little statistical information exists on the effect of HIV/AIDS on the private sector in Lagos. The number of businesses with AIDS policies and programs has risen, but such efforts remain largely the domain of large multi-national companies. Anecdotal information indicates the HIV/AIDS stigma remains high in the workplace. Though business people interviewed assumed some colleagues had HIV/AIDS, none knew a person who admitted to having HIV/AIDS. With so little information on prevalence, Lagos businesses are unable to quantify the effects of HIV/AIDS on absenteeism, productivity, or staff turnover. If the relatively sophisticated companies cannot quantify the effects, a fortiori companies in smaller markets in Nigeria would also be unable to measure the effects. End summary.

2. Methodology: to gain some expression of the effect of HIV/AIDS on businesses in Lagos in the absence of statistical data, econoff spoke with the managing director of the Nigerian branch of a West Africa regional bank, the corporate affairs manager of the Nigerian subsidiary of an international beverage company, the medical director for the Nigerian subsidiary of a multinational oil company, the general manager of one of Nigeria's largest livestock production companies, and the executive secretary of the Nigerian Business Coalition Against AIDS (NIBUCAA). The USG currently supports NIBUCAA's project to get companies to institute HIV/AIDS workplace policy under the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief through USAID.

Policies and Programs Increase
Among Larger Enterprises

3. Among Nigerian businesses, attention to HIV/AIDS has increased in recent years. An increasing number of companies have HIV/AIDS policies and programs. However, few smaller enterprises have policies or programs. For example, NIBUCAA's entire membership is composed of multinational companies, their Nigerian subsidiaries, or the largest of Nigerian enterprises. Even with this increased attention, two of the four large companies interviewed have no HIV/AIDS workplace policy or awareness program. One of the companies with no internal policy supports HIV/AIDS-awareness programs at several universities. A representative of the other company said AIDS is not a "priority disease" for his company, as they lose employees to "many diseases." The company does, however, offer voluntary HIV testing for employees. The NIBUCAA executive secretary said several coalition members and other companies with which he has worked do not want policies for individual diseases; they prefer to address HIV/AIDS under their general health policies.

Employees with HIV/AIDS Still
Avoid Disclosing Status

4. Despite a slight reduction in stigma over the past several years and an increase in the number of Lagos companies with HIV/AIDS policies, people living with HIV/AIDS rarely disclose their status to co-workers or management. One contact commented a "thick curtain of secrecy" remains in place. He estimated that, two years after implementation of a company AIDS policy and continuing awareness programs, perhaps 10 percent of employees have changed their attitudes regarding HIV/AIDS. He said only few employees have used the counseling and testing services the company provides. He suggested the biggest problem is many people still do not believe they will be personally affected by the disease. The representative said, however, that management considers HIV/AIDS programs an obligation to

employees and the company will continue its program regardless of how many employees utilize it.

15. Another contact said he has seen a difference since his company began awareness programs in 1997: people talk about HIV/AIDS more frequently and knowledgeably. He acknowledged, however, that the stigma remains. He said generally, people do not want to know others' HIV status and they do not want others to know their status. The company works to instill in its managers the belief that if they care about business, they have to care about HIV/AIDS.

16. Seeming to support the statement that people do not want to know each others' status, none of the representatives, other than the medical director of one of the companies, knew of anyone in his or her company currently living with HIV/AIDS. One contact said that of his company's 2,500 employees, he knew of four who died of AIDS in the last two years. He knew the cause of death of these four because they used the company clinic. He acknowledged that others unknown to him may have died of AIDS, particularly since many seriously ill employees simply quit work.

Comment

17. With so little information on employees' HIV status, the effect of HIV/AIDS on productivity, absenteeism, and staff turnover goes largely unidentified and currently not measurable among Lagos businesses. None of the representatives had an idea of the level of impact on their company. Until the effects become more measurable, the primary incentive for companies to institute HIV/AIDS policies and programs will continue to be a sense of corporate obligation or fear of the potential consequences if current HIV/AIDS prevalence escalate.